



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Testimony in Support of HJR 11

February 11, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and Members of the committee,

Our Oregon democracy thrives when more voices are heard, and when more people are woven into the fabric of our civic life.

As a state, I believe it is our role to enfranchise Oregonians, to expand opportunities for residents to shape their communities, to lower barriers for participation in self-government, and to proactively take steps to show the people of Oregon that we welcome and encourage the vote for those who want to vote.

Oregonians deserve the freedom and the chance to decide for themselves at the ballot if we take this step to expand access to the ballot, to better help people who lead full, busy, complicated lives who might miss a procedural deadline to have the ability -- the mere *possibility* -- to rectify their situation, and participate in the world's oldest democracy. Currently that remedy does not exist. HJR 11 is a way to fix this profound gap.

In my previous professional experience at the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) my colleagues and I witnessed what difference a policy like Same Day Registration could have had on the lives of Oregonians. In the 2018 election cycle, APANO offered a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) Ballot Assistance Center, working in conjunction with County Elections Office, to help historically marginalized voters, voters with mobility issues, voters new to vote-by-mail, voters newly naturalized, voters who needed language interpretation services, and first time voters so excited to be a part of democracy. Our services were free, volunteer run, open to anyone who came through our doors or contacted us.

There were voters so excited to vote on a ballot that inspired them to rise up and cast their ballot. But some were unfortunately turned away because they missed a registration deadline that they simply weren't aware of. They had studied the measures, asked the right questions, and we saw the effort these people were willing to give to cast an eligible ballot. But our state had closed the door on their participation, arbitrarily, 21 days in advance of an election.

Many of these voters had been told in so many ways, from the legacy of racist voter suppression historically and present day, implicit and explicit, discriminatorily and legally, that politics was not for them, that their voices didn't matter. We must do everything we can to prevent disillusioning and discouraging voters who want to participate.

Oregon has been a leader in voter access but we are now behind 21 other states and the District of Columbia in allowing voters to register on election day. Oregon is the remaining west

coast state without same day voter registration. To register to vote, eligibility is already verified and furthermore County elections offices are allotted time to verify eligibility of any ballot cast, and provisionally-cast ballots go through this process every election with smooth operation. There is strong evidence that same day voter registration increases voter turnout, and that many people who benefit are often people of color, low-income, transient movers and young people who face more barriers to participation.

The cost to our democracy when we deny people the ability to express their American right to vote is high. In this situation, when we have remedies in place that cover this gap in voting, we just need the courage to act on our convictions.

I urge the committee to support HJR 11 and refer this question to the voters. Thank you!